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San Francisco Magazine Article

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October 23, 1978

SAN FRANCISCO MAGAZINE

If you want the Mayor of San Francisco to resemble Evel Knievel, you shouldn't be reading this article.

If you think the leader of this City should grab headlines, make "bold" statements by the hour, and fill City Hall with alot of sound and fury, then maybe you should turn the page.

Because that's precisely the kind of Mayor I've tried not to be during the last few years.

There's a big difference between achievement and rhetoric in public office. As the Mayor of San Francisco, it would be easy to do little more than make outrageous statements and claim credit for imaginary achievements. There's a chance you'll get good press coverage, some people might be impressed, and you certainly don't have to work very hard.

But clearly, you achieve nothing in the process. The price you pay for being such a "tough" leader is the alienation of the very people you need to work with to get things done.

If your routine approach to problem solving consists of inflammatory press releases, chest-beating on the six o'clock news and little else--then you can't really expect to hit on solutions that bring opposing parties together, and promote a reasonable meeting of the minds.

I don't think that's what the people of San Francisco expect from their Mayor. During the last three years, my philosophy has been to work with the diverse groups of this City, bring people together, and hammer out a future for San Francisco that makes sense.

That kind of difficult, even tedious work yields results--but it may not be very exciting. The task of improving MUNI or making streets safer can't always compete with Monday Night Football for thrills. No one ever said that progress makes great copy.

Yet the irony is that this sensible approach makes some citizens

wonder why their Mayor doesn't make "bolder" statements on the issues. Others want to know why the Mayor takes such a "low profile" on city questions.

To me, that's a risk work taking. Because I'll bet my administration's record of solid achievements against a handful of newspaper clippings anyway.

A case in point is the Yerba Buena Convention Center.

Before I took office, Yerba Buena was dead in the water. City Hall had tried to build this project for years, but to no avail. Bitter debate and angry rhetoric always seemed to cloud the issue, and the project appeared to be permanently hung up in litigation.

Skeptics said Yerba Buena would never become a reality. But they were wrong.

One of my first acts as Mayor was to let the people of this City tell us what should be done with Yerba Buena. It seemed clear that if the citizens of our City played a constructive role in the planning of this facility, then we had a chance of promoting a real consensus and getting this development off the dime.

I took that gamble--and it paid off magnificently.

I formed a broad-based citizens committee representing virtually every viewpoint on Yerba Buena, and I told these San Franciscans to hold exhaustive public hearings in our neighborhoods on the issue. I asked them to go outside City Hall and find out what the people wanted.

And that's exactly what they did. This committee held over 50 public hearings, at night, throughout San Francisco on the Yerba Buena question. Maybe these hearings were repetitive; maybe they were long and boring. But we weren't out to make colorful headlines with these deliberations. We were trying to find a complex solution to a complex problem.

In the end we succeeded, because the committee's recommendation for an underground convention center was placed on the November, 1976 ballot, where it was approved by more than 66 percent of the voters.

Three months ago I was proud to host the groundbreaking for this project, and I fully expect us to open Yerba Buena by Spring of 1981. It's going to mean some 3,700 new jobs and \$50 million in additional revenues for our City.

That's a major achievement for this administration and this City, and you can expect more of the same in coming years.

But you shouldn't expect this administration to try and sell a project like Yerba Buena simply by grandstanding on the front page of your newspaper. Don't expect us to try and force a major development proposal on the people of this City in which they haven't been asked to participate.

That kind of politics has been tried before in this City, and it just doesn't work. When I told the people of San Francisco that my administration was going to do something about the quality of local government, I meant business. And if the business of improving the services you have a right to expect doesn't always seem colorful or exciting, it's because this Mayor is more concerned about tangible results than his Nielson ratings.

A recent San Francisco article held out little hope, if any, that City Hall would ever be organized more efficiently. I find that astonishing, first because I don't think it's true, and second because my administration has been attacking this problem for the last three years.

It's especially urgent that we declare war on inefficient city services in the wake of Proposition 13. San Franciscans didn't vote for this measure, but right now I'm determined that we make Proposition 13 work--and work well--in this City.

Implementing a measure like Jarvis-Gann is no simple task, because we're not only compelled to cut the cost of government. In order to preserve vital services with less revenue, we've got to find a way to stretch our dollars further, and to improve the efficiency of city government.

In simple terms, this means that although you have less money to operate a MUNI system, you've got to tighten up the operation of that system in order

to preserve the transportation services which San Franciscans have a right to expect. It means that while your funds for parks and recreation might diminish in the future, you're determined to keep those parks and playgrounds cleaner than before.

The only alternative is to drastically cut back on crucial services, and as I listen to the people of this City it becomes clear that our citizens did not vote last June to dismantle their local government.

Immediately after the June election I announced the formation of an unprecedented effort to root out waste and inefficiency at City Hall. With the cooperation of Mr. Walter Hoadley, the Executive Vice President of the Bank of America, I put together a blue-ribbon committee of representatives from the private sector, labor and the communities of this City.

Called the "Committee for San Francisco," this group has been asked to help us scrutinize the city bureaucracy, streamline operations, and institute those efficiencies in government which the private sector has enjoyed for years.

That's the kind of reform which is long overdue at City Hall. It's going to happen--and very soon. I'm not going to allow a wall of special interests to stand between the people of San Francisco and the efficient government they have a right to demand.

When I formed the Committee for San Francisco, I made it clear that the last thing I wanted was a committee which drafted a report, issued a press statement, and then disbanded. The people who are donating their valuable time to this effort made that equally clear to me. We are going to take the work of this committee very seriously in the coming days and months.

The members of this body will issue periodic progress reports, but I don't think you should hold your breath waiting for banner headlines that describe their achievements.

When a group of topflight administrators from the private sector sit down with a city department head, and the result of their brainstorming is a

less costly accounting system, or a more efficient deployment if city employees, we've made real progress and conceivably saved you money.

But there's no guarantee this story can compete for top billing with a three alarm fire. This is the price we pay for a patient, "low profile" approach to the savings of your tax dollars. But in the long run, I don't think this City has any other choice.

I don't want anyone to think that we've launched this effort to tighten up city government strictly as a result of Proposition 13. Long before Howard Jarvis became a media celebrity, this administration was taking steps to make local government more efficient.

For example, our budgetary operation has reduced the city workforce by 1000 positions over the last three years. That represents a significant saving for San Francisco taxpayers.

Long before Proposition 13 was circulated in the streets, my administration began an effort to modernize the way San Francisco compiles its annual budget.

This might sound like meaningless jargon. But it connects directly with your pocketbook, and that's something every citizen can understand.

When you learn that San Francisco's government has been spending hundreds of millions of dollars each year, yet can't always explain how these expenditures meet specific goals or priorities, you realize that the reform our budget represents something of a revolution for this City.

It's discouraging that these charges were not underway before this administration came to City Hall, but that's what years of neglect and routine can do to the operation of local government. Until this administration, few had seriously challenged the business as usual that stifled City Hall in the recent past.

Lest you think that I'm handing you a bill of goods, an authority no less respected than John Jacobs, the Executive Director of SPUR (San Francisco

Planning and Urban Renewal), an organization which has monitored city administrations since 1910, recently said:

"Moscone's administration, more than any other in at least twelve years, has been willing to do something about the administrative chaos that is called San Francisco city government. He inherited a bureaucratic jungle that has required enormous effort and no little political risk to initiate managerial efficiencies. This mess was created over decades, and change will not be achieved without understanding and political support."

If you still think that "nothing is happening at City Hall," you should know that I submitted a major charter amendment for the November ballot which, if approved, will finally bring some order to the transportation network in this City.

It's an unfortunate fact of life that our transportation services are not well coordinated, and that they often run counter to each other's best interests.

I find it unacceptable, for example, that the officials who plot traffic patterns on our streets do not devise these policies in tandem with MUNI officials. The bunching of MUNI busses is a direct outgrowth of this problem, because the people responsible for deploying MUNI vehicles aren't always working side by side with the people who regulate traffic congestion on our streets.

This can create bureaucratic nightmares for a Mayor, and for the people of this City as well. It's precisely the kind of problem I've been attacking in local government for the last three years.

In submitting Proposition A for the November ballot, I proposed that we create a unified department of transportation in San Francisco. This proposal won't make all of our transit problems disappear overnight, but it's a healthy step in the right direction.

There are other changes underway at City Hall. In a world dominated

by Papal upheavals, air disasters and mideastern summitry, you might have overlooked the fact that

*Serious crime has been reduced by 7.2% in this City during the last two years.

*My office has inaugurated a program that allows small businesses to remain in San Francisco, secure low-interest loans, and create new jobs for San Franciscans.

*Retail development in San Francisco is booming, with the recent opening of a Bullocks outlet, and new stores planned by Saks Fifth Avenue and Neiman Marcus.

*The Port of San Francisco, under topflight new management, is spearheading a program of maritime revitalization and development along the northern and central waterfront.

*Projects like Pier 39 and the Performing Arts Center are either completed or well on their way to completion, after ~~many~~ years of delay.

None of these things have happened by accident. As long as I am the Mayor of San Francisco, this City is going to be guided by an administration that demands--and gets--results.

When a close look at our City departments reveals that they're not operating properly, we're not going to sweep these problems under the rug. We've made a practice of identifying these shortcomings and correcting them in the past, and this policy will continue in the future.

When newspapers broke stories relative to parking meter collections and welfare fraud, it was generally overlooked that this administration did not just "inherit" such longstanding problems. We had taken steps long before to root them out, and make sure they did not re-occur.

It's ironic that you are often associated with the problems you try to correct, but I'm never going to let that deter me from the work that needs to be done at City Hall.

People like to think that a Mayor takes office with a clean slate, and

ample opportunity to pursue new initiatives in government. That's a pleasant daydream, but in this City it's rarely the case.

Within a few days of my inauguration, for example, this City learned that it was operating with a \$20 million deficit, as a result of past budgetary decisions. Shortly thereafter, the Regional Water Quality Control Board threatened us with a citywide building ban, because in previous years San Francisco had not met its responsibilities to clean up the sewage we dump into the Bay. In short order the City was subjected to a 38-day municipal strike, and on my first day in office the San Francisco Giants announced they were leaving town.

That's a difficult baptism for any Mayor, but our problems were compounded by a recall election nearly a year later, and the more recent passage of Proposition 13--which is a municipal bombshell by anyone's standards.

Yet none of these diversions have stopped this administration from keeping its fundamental promises to the people of San Francisco.

As a candidate for Mayor I said that we would bring more diverse people into government than ever before--and today our City boards and commissions reflect the multitude of communities and ethnic groups in this City to an unprecedented degree.

As a candidate I said that we had to get this City moving again, that projects like Yerba Buena had to get cracking or my administration would have to be judged a failure. Today Yerba Buena is well on its way to completion.

But most importantly, I told the voters of this City that when they elected me, they had elected a fulltime, hard-working Mayor who places results over and above the posturing to which other public officials may resort. I said that at the end of four years I wanted to be judged by what we had done for this City, and not on the basis of a polished press image.

So the next time you wonder why this administration doesn't appear to take a particularly "forceful" stand on the issues, it might just be that we are actually trying to get something done at City Hall, rather than dazzle

you with fancy media footwork.

And if you wonder why you may not have heard or read about many of the accomplishments I've described here, you might be interested in the following story.

Recently my office held two press conferences on successive days. The first dealt with the "Committee for San Francisco," and its laudable effort to root out waste and inefficiency in local government.

The second press conference dealt with a new ordinance I had just signed, requiring dog owners to pick up dog litter on their daily rounds.

I'll let you guess which story was buried with eight paragraphs on page ten, and which story received the banner treatment on the front page.

Perhaps this is a fact of life. But I have every confidence that the voters of San Francisco can tell the difference between real achievements and that which is just so much garbage.

If they can't, we're all in big trouble.

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